DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 950 EA 022 438

TITLE	Caught in the Crossfire: A Report on Gun Violence in Our Nation's Schools.
INSTITUTION	Center To Prevent Handgun Violence, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	Sep 90
NOTE	10p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Statistical Data (110)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; *Homicide; Juvenile Gangs; *Public Schools; *School Safety; *Victims of Crime; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Firearms

ABSTRACT

Based on news stories from U.S. newspapers, this report examines the prevalence of gun violence in American schools. During the past 4 years, beginning with September 1986, at least 71 people (65 students and 6 employees) have been killed with guns at school. Another 201 were severely wounded, and 242 individuals were held hostage at gunpoint. During this same period, shootings or hostage situations have occurred in at least 35 states and the District of Columbia. Males are most frequently offenders (93 percent) as well as victims (76 percent). School children aged 14-17 are most at risk of gun violence in school, which occurs most often in hallways (25 percent) and in classrooms (19 percent). Gang or drug disputes were the leading cause of school gun violence (18 percent). Longstanding arguments (15 percent), romantic disagreements (12 percent), fights over material possessions (10 percent), and accidents (13 percent) are also common. Handguns are the overwhelming choice of firearm for those who committed gun violence in schools. Gun confiscation figures are also increasing yearly in schools across the U.S. With an estimated 400,000 boys carrying handguns to school yearly, there is a tremendous potential for even greater rates of death, injury, and violence. (MLH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED325950
EA022438

Caught In The Crossfire:

A Report On Gun Violence in Our Nation's Schools

September 1990

Center to Prevent Handgun Violence
1225 Eye Street, NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 289-7319

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Schlesinger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

Caught In The Crossfire:

A Report on Gun Violence In Our Nation's Schools

INTRODUCTION

As children across the country return to school this week, they are facing a crisis in education that has reached epidemic proportions -- violence in school. While parents have always worried about their children's education and their abilities to read, write and do basic mathematics, many are also becoming horrified by a new threat. They fear that their children may be severely injured or may not come home from school at all.

Our nation's schools, once thought to be safe havens, have fallen victim to an increase in gun violence, and educators and children are caught in the crossfire. One old, but true education adage goes, "Schools are reflections of their communities." This is particularly true when it comes to gun violence. As the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence worked on this report, one fact became very clear -- if a community suffers from gun violence, its schoolchildren also suffer.

ABSTRACT

This report, "Caught In The Crossfire: A Report on Gun Violence In Our Nation's Schools," focuses on the increasing gun violence occurring in and around our schools. In the past four academic years, beginning in September 1986:

- At least 71 people - 65 students and 6 school employees - have been killed with guns at school; another 201 were severely wounded; and 242 individuals were held hostage at gunpoint.
- Shootings or hostage situations in schools have occurred in at least 35 states and the District of Columbia.
- Males are most frequently the offenders (93%) as well as the victims (76%).
- Schoolchildren aged 14-17 are most at risk of gun violence at school.
- Gun violence in schools occurs most often in hallways (25%) and in classrooms (19%).

- Gang or drug disputes were the leading cause of school gun violence (18%). Long-standing arguments (15%), romantic disagreements (12%), fights over material possessions (10%), and accidents (13%) are also common.

- Handguns were the overwhelming choice of firearm (75%) for those who committed gun violence in schools.

METHOD

The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence examined gun violence in both public and private schools during the past four academic years, beginning with September 1986. The information in this report was abstracted from more than 2,500 news stories in our nation's newspapers. For purposes of this study, we examined all incidents which we were able to uncover where shootings occurred at school during school functions or where individuals held others hostage at gunpoint on school property during school functions. The Center examined 227 such incidents in this report. It should be noted that the accuracy and frequency of the information in this report is based solely on newspaper accounts. This method was necessary because only the state of California requires that such information be publicly disclosed.

RESULTS

During the past four school years, at least 71 people have been killed with guns at school (Table 1). At least another 201 were severely wounded. In addition, at least 242 individuals were held hostage by gun wielding assailants.

Table 1: Individual Deaths or Woundings

	Deaths	Woundings	Total
Students	65	186	251
School Employees	6	15	21
Total	**71**	**201**	**272**

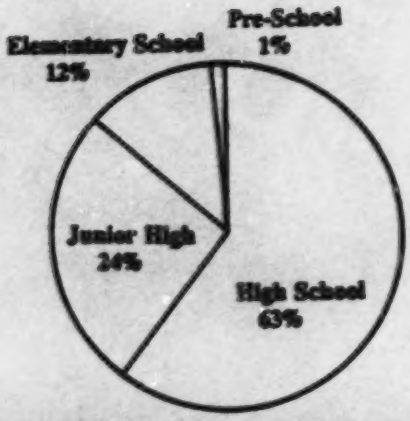
School shootings or hostage taking occurred in 35 states and the District of Columbia (Table 2). Besides the most populated states having the most incidents, there was no clear geographic pattern for gun violence in school. It seemed to strike every area of the country.

Table 2: Number of Incidents, Deaths, and Woundings By State

State	# Incidents	Deaths	Woundings
California	29	16	45
Florida	25	10	10
New York	23	3	21
Texas	17	4	10
Georgia	14	1	15
Maryland	10	1	9
Michigan	9	3	6
Missouri	8	3	6
North Carolina	7	0	12
Illinois	7	7	12
Alabama	5	1	4
Arizona	5	1	2
Arkansas	5	3	4
New Jersey	5	2	3
Oregon	5	1	0
South Carolina	5	2	9
Tennessee	5	1	2
Connecticut	4	0	2
Louisiana	4	2	2
Pennsylvania	4	0	3
Virginia	4	2	3
Washington	4	0	2
Mississippi	3	0	3
Ohio	3	0	2
Dist. of Columbia	2	1	4
Kentucky	2	1	0
Massachusetts	2	0	2
Oklahoma	2	0	2
Rhode Island	2	1	2
Colorado	1	0	1
Indiana	1	1	0
Iowa	1	0	1
Minnesota	1	0	0
Montana	1	3	1
Nevada	1	0	1
Utah	1	1	0
Total	227	71	201

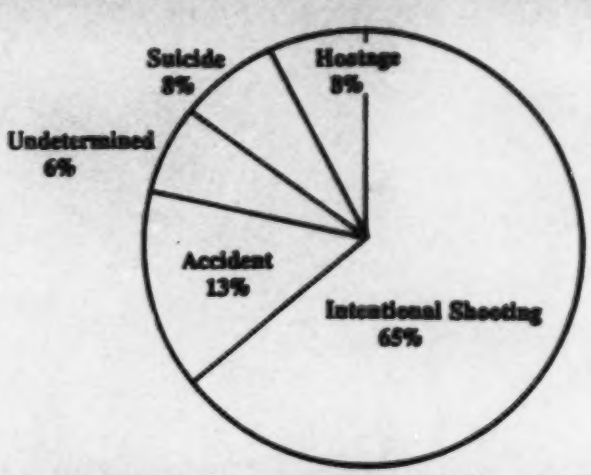
Most of these incidents took place in high schools (Table 3). Incidents were more than twice as likely to occur in high schools than any other level.

Table 3. Schools Affected By Gun Violence



Four types of gun violence were recorded in this report (intentional shootings of or at other individuals, suicide, accidental shootings, and hostage taking at gunpoint). Intentional shootings of or at other individuals were reported four times more frequently than any other type (Table 4). Accidental shootings were the second most common form.

Table 4. Types of Gun Violence



Males were far more likely to be the offenders in school shootings and hostage takings (Table 5). Males were also more likely to be the victims or targets of school shootings (Table 6). Please note that one or more persons could have been the offenders and victims of gun violence, and this is reflected in these numbers.

Table 5: Offenders

Males	260 (93%)
Females	20 (7%)

Table 6: Victims or Targets

Males	270 (76%)
Females	85 (24%)

Youngsters aged 14-17 were most likely to be the offenders and victims of gun violence (Table 7). When students, 12 and under, were the victims of gun violence in schools, 94 percent of the students were victimized by adults. When students, 13 and older,

were victims, 82 percent of the offenders were other students or other teenagers who came on school campuses.

Table 7: Age Breakdown of Offenders and Victims

Age	Offenders	Victims or Targets
Adults	23	38
19	8	7
18	17	18
17	48	49
16	53	46
15	43	37
14	31	30
13	18	13
12	12	4
11	1	2
10	2	7
9	0	12
8	1	25
7	2	17
6	1	10
5	1	3
Undetermined Teen	19	20
Undetermined Child	0	17
TOTAL	280	355

There was not one major cause for gun violence in schools (Table 8). Rather, there were five causes that sparked most of the incidents -- gang-drug related activity, continuations of long-standing disagreements, playing with or cleaning guns in schools, fights over material possessions, and romantic disagreements.

Table 8: Root Causes for Gun Violence in Schools

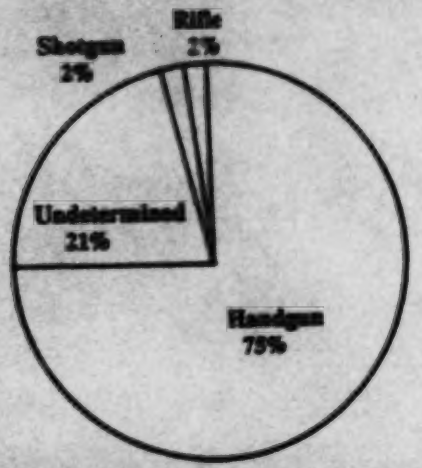
Cause	Incidents	Percentage
Drugs/Gangs	40	18%
Long-Standing Disagreements	35	15%
Playing with or Cleaning guns	30	13%
Romantic Disagreements	27	12%

(continued on next page)

Fights over Material Possessions	22	10%
Depression	21	9%
Vendetta Against Society	14	6%
Racial	12	5%
Name Calling	10	4%
Vendetta Against School Employee	8	4%
Undetermined	8	4%

Handguns were the weapon of choice for students and adults who committed gun-related violence in schools (Table 9).

Table 9. Weapons



Activities during the regular school day were the most common for school shootings and hostage takings (Table 10). Periods between classes were the most common times for shootings, followed by actual classroom learning situations.

Table 10: Activities When Gun Violence in School Occurs

Activity	Incidents	Percentage
Between Classes	72	32%
During Class	51	22%
After School	36	16%
Lunchtime	20	8%
Athletic Events	20	8%
Transporting to and from School (buses)	15	7%
Before School	11	5%
School Carnival	1	1%
Transporting to Field Trip	1	1%

Most of the shootings and hostage taking occurred inside schools, with hallway and classroom being the most common locations (Table 11). A sizable number occurred on school grounds and areas located adjacent to school grounds.

Table 11: Locations of Shootings or Hostage Takings

Location	Incidents	Percentage
Hallways	57	25%
Classrooms	44	19%
School Grounds	35	15%
Adjacent Property	20	9%
Athletic Facilities	19	8%
School Buses	16	7%
School Parking Lot	11	5%
Cafeteria	8	4%
Restroom	5	2%
Auditorium	1	1%
Undetermined	11	5%

PREVIOUS DATA ON GUN VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

Based on a national survey of students, the National School Safety Center estimated that 135,000 boys carried guns to school daily in 1987. An estimated 270,000 others carried guns to school at least once during the year.

In California, the only state that publishes annual data on school gun confiscations, the number of gun incidents increased 40 percent in the 1988-89 school year over the previous year. In the last four years, a 100 percent overall increase was reported, including a 50 percent rise in elementary schools and 80 percent increase in middle schools. The increase at the high school level was 142 percent.

In Florida, a 42 percent increase in gun incidents was reported during the 1987-88 school year. The rate in Florida has maintain this high level. The Chicago Public Schools reported a 50 percent rise in gun incidents in 1988. Hundreds of other school systems, from the Seattle, Washington, school district to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools in North Carolina, have reported similar trends in recent years.

CONCLUSION

Guns and gun violence are a growing concern among educators, students, and parents. While this study examined actual violence, i.e. shootings and hostage taking at gunpoint, we must also be concerned with the potential for gun violence that exists in our nation's schools. With an estimated 400,000 boys carrying handguns to school yearly, there is a tremendous potential for even greater rates of death, injury, and violence.

There are many reasons why gun violence is increasing in our schools. But, one simple factor leading to these shootings must not be overlooked -- the sheer availability of guns in America. For every household in the country there are two guns in the hands of private citizens. Often these guns are falling into the hands of youngsters and they are ending up in schools. A report issued by the Florida School Boards Association found that 86 percent of the weapons confiscated from students in 1986-88 came from students' homes.

Our nation's parents, educators, lawmakers and law enforcement officials must work together to reduce the gun violence in our schools. Students must be educated about the great danger involved in carrying guns and the real facts about gun violence. Parents must be informed about the steps they can take to reduce the potential for violence -- i.e., making sure youngsters do not have access to guns in the home. And, lawmakers and law enforcement officials must work together to make sure that those who carry guns and those who commit gun violence on school property receive swift, severe punishment.

There is no place in our nation's schools for guns and gun violence. We must act now if we are going to reduce the tragic toll guns in schools are taking upon our children and our nation's future.

• • •

This report was written and supervised by Dennis Smith, the Center's director of public education. Barbara Lautman, Vanessa Scherzer and Jacqueline Sternberg of the Center contributed to the completion of this report.

All information in this study is based solely on the accuracy and frequency of newspaper articles from across the country.